

Mount Ophir Legends.

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I. In No. 60 of this Journal there is an interesting account of Malacca by Barretto de Resende.

In connection with the last part of it, regarding Gunong Ledang (Mount Ophir), the following notes may be of interest.

Lately, when visiting Kampongs at the base of the mountain, I obtained the modern, 1912, version of the story.

In a cave which is brilliantly illuminated by scintillating lights, lives the Queen-Goddess or Sorceress, variously described as a "*Bidahari*," "*Perempuan Sakti*" etc. There she is waited upon by "Spirits of the air" (called formerly *Benuas*.) demons, and a tiger who is her familiar, into whom she can at will project herself.

She resents all attempts of Malays to climb the mountain, but English (*orang puteh*) are exempt from her anger, because it has not struck her they would ever wish to remain on the mountain! Hence also, Malays are suffered to ascend temporarily when acting as guides.

All animals bow down to her, and her tiger has a sense of smell so keen that he can inform her at once when a party commences to ascend. The Sorceress then retires into her cave, which eye of man has never seen, or mayhap she is pleased to enter the tiger. Once long, long ago, the last Sultan but one (? Ala-e-din), wished to make friends with the Sorceress, and sent from Malacca ambassadors, dressed in fresh odoriferous tiger skins, to offer her marriage on his own behalf. Her reply was that she would accept the offer only when the Sultan fulfilled the following requirements.

First, he must build a bridge of solid gold from the top of her mountain to the Malacca Hill, whereby she might be suitably conveyed across.

Secondly, the Sultan must send her 10,000 mosquitos' hearts as a present.

Thirdly he must send a cupful of his own blood.

The Sultan replied that he was rich enough to build the bridge of gold, and that 10,000 mosquitos' hearts were easy to supply, but to give of his heart's blood was quite impossible. So the negotiations fell through. Before ascending the mountain, a counter spell supplied by the village Pawang at considerable expense, is a necessity for a Malay who is willing to brave the Hantus, jins, and malevolent demons of the mountain.

An enlightened Mohomedan Malay of the neighbourhood, whose child's life we had saved in a dangerous illness, when pressed to speak openly, confessed his firm belief that the mountain was the resort of demons, saying, "There would not be all these stories without reality behind them."

It will be noted that the many tigers formerly infesting the mountain, are now reduced to one. No doubt when a good road up has been constructed, and Mount Ophir is a favorite Sanitarium for the sick and tired inhabitants of Negri Sembilan and Malacca districts, the Sorceress and all the demons will betake themselves elsewhere.

II. In reference to the "Saletes" (orang-laut), mentioned in the appendix, I have occasionally seen their present day descendants in the art, spearing their fish in deep water just as it was done of old. The javelin, attached by thin twine to the wrist, is thrown with sure and powerful aim by the fisherman, standing not in a boat, but on some miniature pier or "water-machan" of bamboo, built into the sea.

III. In connection with Goddesses, it may be of interest to report that one day in a distant Kampong, I found the Malays busy propitiating the celebrated Hindu Goddess of Smallpox, *Sitta*.

I was familiar with her chief shrine, to be found near Gurgaon, Punjab, which is yearly visited by crowds of pilgrims from all over Northern and Central India.

In this case, the familiar ceremonies were being performed by a Hindu fakir (holy man) in orange garments, bearing on his forehead the three-fold upright marks of Civa the Destroyer, assisted by two followers chanting appropriate mantras to a small mud image of the "Slaying One." With simple faith, the people paid heavily for this attempt to avert the epidemic.

One was reminded of the saying (Rg Veda) "They speak of Mitra, Varuna, Agni;—that which Is and is One, the poets call in various ways."